

HINDU KINGDOMS AT CONTEXTUAL LEVEL

The cultural boundary of a civilizational region extends beyond the administrative boundary and hence sometimes it becomes difficult to draw a clear-cut demarcating line around a civilizational region. However, for our present purpose of locating these two civilizational regions, first of all they are described particularly at the observational level and thereafter these two regions will be discussed from different angles.

Location of Mithila and Mahakoshal

The civilizational region of Mithila is unanimously considered to be that tract of the land, which is located towards the north of the Ganga in the state of Bihar. Mithila, which is also popularly known as the Videhas, Tirabhukti or modern Tirhut, is that part of the country, which falls in between $25^{\circ}.52'$ North latitude and $84^{\circ}.56'$ and $86^{\circ}.46'$ East longitude.¹ Presently, it comprises the districts of Champaran (east and west), Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, Darbhanga, Samastipur, Saharsa, Purnea, parts of the districts of Monghur and Bhagalpur. In addition to it, the area of Mithila region extends beyond the administrative boundary of some of these districts and some of the adjoining areas of the districts of Champaran, Sitamarhi, Madhubani, Saharsa and Purnea, which are popularly called as the Terai area of Nepal as well as the lower ranges of the Himalayas also fall under the civilizational region of Mithila.

The civilizational region of Mithila, as it emerges now from the above description, may also be called as well-marked natural region, although its size and territorial extension have varied in different ages, which will be discussed later on. From the foothills of the Himalayas in the north to the Ganga in the south, it is about one hundred miles broad and from the Mahananda in the east to the Gandaki in the west, it is about two hundred and fifty miles long and approximately the total area of the Mithila region may be estimated about 2500 square miles.

The civilizational region of Mahakoshal is located in central India and falls in between 80° and 84° Longitude and 21° and 23° Latitude approximately. Presently unlike Mithila it is considered to be that tribal and hilly tract of the land which included the districts of Raipur, Bilaspur, Durg, Mandla, Balaghat, Sarguja, Raigarh and Sahdol in the State of Madhya Pradesh. Today this area is also popularly known as Chhatisgarh, the cultural boundary of which coincides, more or less with the administrative boundary of old Chhatisgarh Commissionary which was formed for the first time in 1854 after the fall of Ratanpur Kingdom, wherefrom the kings of the Haihai dynasty ruled for more than 700 years.²

Like Mithila the civilizational region of Mahakoshal was also a sovereign kingdom, although its size and territorial extensions have varied from age to age. However, the present cultural frontiers of Mahakoshal are, more or less, the same as revealed from the itinerary of the famous Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsiang,³ who had visited Mahakoshal sometime in AD 639. According to him, the kingdom of Mahakoshal was bounded by Ujjain on the north, Vidharba on the west, Utkal on the east and by Andhra and Kalinga on the south. This ancient boundary of Mahakoshal may also be roughly compared with the present day cultural area of Chhatisgarh in Madhya Pradesh and according to this corresponding cultural area, the circuit of this large tract of these eight districts, as mentioned above, may be estimated more than one thousand miles.⁴

Land and People of the Regions

The land of the region of Mithila considered to be a great alluvial plain with a general slope from north to south, varied by a depression in the centre. This region lies on a low level, in many places indented with chains of shallow marshes marking the lines of drainage by which the local rainfall and the overflow of the hill streams which intersect the district find their way southwards in the Ganga. Most of the rivers,⁵ viz. the Gandak, the Kamla, the Jibachh, the Kareh, the Bagmati, the Kosi, the Balan, Tiljuga, etc, of this region flow on raised beds, which they have gradually constructed for themselves out of the silt brought down from the mountains in Nepal. However, the alluvial plain of this area, diversified by these river ridges, is rich in all sorts of crops.

The soil pattern of this region may be broadly divided into three kinds, viz. *Balsundri* (a sandy loam), *Bangaror Chikna* (a clayey soil with an admixture of sand) and *Matiyari* (a clayey soil with little or no sand). Considering the three main classes of soil, the physical divisions of this region may also be classified into three main subdivisions. For instance, the *Balsundri* type of soil is mostly found in the south-western part of this region, covering the areas of Samastipur, Dalsinghsarai, part of Muzaffarpur extending up to the district of Monghyr. Similarly, the *Matiyari* soil is mostly found in the north and central area of this region, which is considered to be extremely retentive of moisture and is best suited for the growth of winter paddy. However, this distribution of soil may not be considered very strictly, for the *Matiyari* soils are found in the *Chauris* (water logging area) of Samastipur, the southern part of this tract, and the *Balsundri* soil in the high lands of the north.

So far the soil pattern of the Mahakoshal region is concerned, it varies to some extent from the soil of Mithila. As most part of the region is covered by forest, particularly of Ambikapur, Kathgora, Baihar, Balaghat, Dhamtari, etc, the area of the actual cultivable land is comparatively reduced. Again, as there are number of hills, which are the offshoots of big Satpura hilly range, the soil pattern, in and around these hills, is of *Rori* type. However, the soil of the central part of this region, particularly of the tahsils of Bilaspur, Janjgir, Sakti, Balod Bazar, Raipur, Mahasamund, Bemetara, Kawardha, etc, is quite fertile and may be considered to be alluvial and plain. In this connection, it may be mentioned here that it is this tract of the region which is considered to be the granary of Chhatisgarh.

Principal Crops

The principal crops of both the regions are *Aghani*, that is, winter crops, when varieties of paddy are harvested. However, the general crops of these regions may fall under three main harvests, viz. the *Aghani*, the *Bhadai* and the *Rabi*. As mentioned above, the *Aghani* is the winter crop, which is harvested in the months of *Aghrahan* and *Push* (December-January). Among the important *Aghani* paddy crops, which are very popular in these two regions, mention may be made of *Basmati*, *Biranful*, *Tulsiful*, *Kanakjir*, *Harinkel*, *Kamod*, etc, in Mithila, and *Dubraj*, *Sonakathi*, etc, in Mahakoshal respectively. The *Bhadai* is the early autumn crop,

which is harvested in the month of *Bhado* (August-September). Among some of the important *Bhada* crops which are very common in both the regions, mention may be made of maize, *Marua* (*Eleusine coracana*), millets, *chamari*, *gaddair*, etc. The *Rabi* crop includes such cold weather crops as wheat, barley, oats, grams, pulses, etc. In this connection, it may be mentioned here that the cultivation of wheat in Mithila region has been started rather late in comparison to Mahakoshal. Only after the independence of India and particularly after the great famine of 1966-67 the people of Mithila region have realized the importance of wheat cultivation and with the improved variety of wheat seed, now available through various government agencies, people have been attracted towards wheat cultivation.

In addition to these principal crops, the people of Mithila region also produce sugar cane, tobacco, chillies, and jute (only in eastern part) which are their cash crops. However, out of these cash crops, only tobacco and very rarely sugar cane are produced in the region of Mahakoshal.

Water Crops

In addition to these principal and cash crops, there are a few water crops which include *makhana* and *singhara*. *Makhana* grows in tanks and ditches, which is the speciality of Mithila region only. It is planted in the beginning of the rainy season in shallow ponds and collected about the end of March. *Makhana* is a very profitable crop as it is sold today @ Rs 60 to 80 per kilogram. Its nutrition value is also very great and is a unique product of Mithila. *Singhara* (water creeper) is also grown widely in the tanks, ditches and the *chaurs* of both the regions. Although the cultivation of *makhana* is confined to Mithila only, the *singhara* is cultivated widely in Mahakoshal. It is planted in July and is gathered by the end of October-November.

As there are number of rivers in Mithila, which is also visited by floods every year, there are various types of water crops, such as the *saruk* (or *saruki*), *bhent*, etc, and the poor people eat them during the months of *Aswin*, *Kartik* (October-November).

Fisheries

Fish is a favourite item of food for the people of Mithila and it has got ritualistic ⁶ value also. In Mithila *manchh-bhat* (fish and rice) is

a proverbial as well as the staple diet of the people. As there are many rivers, ponds, lakes and low waterlogged areas, popularly called in Mithila as *chaurs*, varieties of fish are found in this region. According to the nature of water, typology of fish can be made and accordingly the common species, viz. *Rohu*, *Kalboch*, *Katla*, *Naini* (Mirgal), *Modni*, *Bhuna*, etc, are found in the ponds and lakes, while *Boari*, *Saura*, *Bhonra*, *Kanti*, *Chechra*, etc, in the rivers and *chaurs*, and *Kabai*, *Garai*, *Mangur*, *Singhi*, *Gainchi*, etc, in the mud water areas, particularly in the small ditches and trenches which are known in Mithila as *chabhacha*, *dabra*, etc.

Although in the Mahakoshal region there are a number of big ponds, yet there is lack of various *chaurs* and *lakes*. However, fish is quite a popular dish among them and as Chhatisgarh area is producing various qualities of rice, such as *Dubraj*, *Sonakathi*, etc, they relish fish with fine quality of rice.

Fruits

A major part of the region of Mithila comprises alluvial soil and enjoys the privilege of certain factors with regard to soil and climate which are favourable for the growth of some kinds of fruits and vegetables, mention among them may be made of mango, *litchi*, guava, lemon, banana, *bel*, etc. Out of these fruits, mango is the principal commercial fruit of the region and it occupies the largest acreage and the choicest variety of *langra* of Mithila area. It has widespread market throughout the state of Bihar as well as outside the state. In addition to *langra*, the other varieties of mango are, *Bombay*, *Kishanbhog*, *Kalkatia*, *Sipia*, *Sukul*, *Zarda*, *Kapuria*, *Bothua*, etc.

Next to mango, counts the acreage and importance of *litchi*, guava, banana, *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*) *dhatri* (*Phyllanthus emblica*), lemon, etc.

Although most of these fruits are also found in the region of Mahakoshal, yet the large varieties of these fruits are uncommon in this region, to some extent. Again, there are various local names for these fruits. For instance, while the guava is known as *latam* in Mithila area, it is called as *bihi* in Mahakoshal.

Some indigenous vegetables like the *khamour*, *oal* (elephant's foot), *patua sag*, *thadhia* and *chatrigenarhi sag* (all leafy vegetables), *tilkorapat*, etc, are the typical specialities of Mithila area. According

to the pandits of Mithila, these leafy vegetables, specially the *tilkorapat*, have medicinal and ritualistic values.

Besides these indigenous vegetables, now with the improved scientific techniques, the people of Mithila are producing varieties of vegetables like the cauliflower, brinjal, lady finger, potato, tomato, beans, etc.

People of the Regions

People of both the civilizational regions belong to different castes and tribes and practise different traditional occupations, although their traditional occupations, practice of untouchability, etc, are loosening their hold, particularly after the independence of India. In spite of these changes, castes, however, have not become extinct from the regions and for our present academic purpose, a few important castes and tribes are described.

While the region of Mithila has been caste conscious centre for quite a long time where the Brahmins have dominant position in the society and that is why they have shaped the *Shastric* style of life of Mithila, the people of Mahakoshal, because of numerous tribes found in the region, have adopted a mixed style of life, which will be, of course, discussed in detail later on. The following are the principal castes of Mithila region, which are described here in brief, with a view to throwing light on the caste structure of the civilizational region.

Brahmins

The Brahmins of Mithila region are called as Maithil Brahmins and speak a language called "Maithili", which has its own script, independent history and literature. However, they also speak Hindi, specially in the urban area. They belong to the *panch gaur* section of the Brahmins of India. As far as the Vedic typology of Brahmins is concerned, the Maithil Brahmins belong to only two Vedas, that is, the Yajur-Veda (the Madhyandin Sakha of the Suklapaksha) and the Sama-Veda. Again, as per the Vedic⁸ *Sanghita*, the Maithil Brahmins are divided into two categories, that is, the *Bachasnai* and the Chhandog and each group is strictly exogamous. On the basis of existing social hierarchy, the Maithil Brahmins are further classified according to their Mulgrams, which further lead them to the four broad social orders, viz. the Strotiyas, the Yogs, the Panji and the

Jaiwars. As per the traditional convention each of this section is expected to be endogamous, but these days due to several social, political and economic factors this social order is no more maintained strictly.

Kayasthas

Like the Maithil Brahmins, the Kayasthas of Mithila are also divided into different subgroups, but among them the Karan Kayasthas are in overwhelming number. The Karan Kayasthas are believed to be the descendants of those Kayasthas who came from Karnataka (Mysore) during the reign of the Karnataka dynasty who ruled Mithila from 1097 AD to 1324 AD (Thakur, 1956). The incidence of literacy among them is very high and they are considered most suitable for the job of *munshi* (traditional clerical job) and teachers.

Rajputs

Rajputs are scattered all over the region of Mithila and among them the sub-castes are very large, such as Udayvanshi, Rajvanshi, Suryavanshi, Chandravanshi, etc. A few subgroups of Rajputs consider themselves to be higher than the others. In social hierarchy although this social barrier is now on decline the marriages between the subgroups are taking place. They are mostly landowners, cultivators, lawyers, doctors, etc, while a few of them are petty Zamindars also. The Rajputs of Mithila area have social relationship with the Rajputs of other parts of India and in this way this caste group is more exposed to outside the region than others.

Bhumihars

In Mithila area, though Bhumihars are comparatively less in number than the Maithil Brahmins and Rajputs, but unlike them, most of the Bhumihars are very rich and own large cultivable land. They have an aristocratic bearing, but at the same time they are very hard working, clever and polished in talk and behaviour

Bania

In Mithila the term "Bania" is loosely applied for different types of caste groups, which include Agarwala, Kasera, Thatheras, Kesarbani, Kasodan, Lohar, Sonar, Suri, Teli, etc. All these caste groups are, more or less, businessmen and carry on different kinds of trade. Some of the Agarwalas are very rich and they generally

deal in cloth, although recently some of them have become the contractors also. The Kaseras and Thatheras are braziers and sell utensils of different kinds either by holding shops in the towns or in the villages or sometime by hawking. Kasodans deal in various types of spices and have also adopted hardware business. Telis, Suris and Kesarbanis mostly deal in oil, grocery, etc, and a few of them are cultivators also. Sonars (goldsmith) and Lohars (ironsmith) generally deal in the making and selling of ornaments (both gold and silver) and the iron agricultural implements respectively. Lohars are also called as Barhi in the Village.

Each group is an endogamous society and exogamy is strictly prohibited. However, the inter-caste relation is very cordial.

Koeris and Kurmis

The Koeris and Kurmis are really the backbone of the agricultural economy of the region. They are essentially cultivators and as a class, are very industrious and peaceful. In and around the big towns like Darbhanga, Madhubani, etc, of the region, the Koeris grow vegetables for the neighbouring markets and show considerable enterprise. The Kurmis are more educated than the Koeris, and several of them have taken up various types of professions like law, medicine, business, etc. A few Kurmis of the towns of Darbhanga and Madhubani are good contractors also.

Ahirs

In Mithila area, the Ahirs, are also known as Gopes, Yadava or Gowala. At one time their principal occupation was rearing cattle and that is why they are mostly to be found on the banks of the rivers Kamala, Balan, Burhi Gandak, etc, probably because the excellent grazing lands near the river side had attracted them to settle there. But now most of them are cultivators. They are divided into four sub-castes, viz. Majraut, Kishnaut, Gorla and Kanauija. Out of these, the Kishnauts prefer a claim of precedence over others on the tradition that Lord Krishna was born in their caste. Though literacy is not much among them, politically they are very conscious and more organized than others. Due to these changes, the Ahirs are now getting weaned away from their traditional occupation of producing and selling milk and milk products for which Mithila region was famous once.

Dhanuks and Kahars

They belong to the Backward classes and are largely recruited as personal servants. Previously during the period of Zamindari they used to be employed as palanquin bearers but now palanquins have become rare and, therefore, with the advancement of time and change they have adopted various professions. In the neighbouring towns they can be seen pulling rickshaws, running small canteens and tea stalls, etc. In Mithila area Dhanuks are also called as Mandals and in comparison to Kahars, literacy is more among the Mandals. In the villages of Mithila the services of Dhanuks and Kahars are much required even today, particularly for carrying the *bhars* on the occasion of marriage and other ceremonies.

Dhobi

Under the Constitution of India, the Dhobis have been declared as scheduled caste. They are mostly found in the villages of Mithila where they are required to perform certain traditional customs and duties (*britis*) during the time of marriage and other ceremonies. In the rural areas they are paid both in cash and kind but in towns and urban areas they are paid in cash only. The washermen in the urban areas have formed their caste *panchayat* (unions) and as per the decision of their union, they would not wash clothes on the particular day and would often inflict punishment for breaches of their convention.

Hajam (or Naua)

They have also been declared as one of the backward classes by the Constitution of India. They are also known as *Nai*, *Thakur*, etc. They have the traditional reputation of being shrewd and intelligent. Their chief profession is shaving and cutting hair and some of them have "reserved villages" or cluster of families at their disposal where other barbers cannot cut hair. The social status of the hajam, is more or less, determined along with the number of villages "reserved" at his disposal, which are called "*Kamai ke Gaon*". They are also paid both in kind and cash. It is interesting to observe that in different harvesting seasons like *Aghani*, *Bhadai*, etc, they are given different crops at different rates.

Previously they used to be considered good surgeons. Even today in some of the interior villages of Mithila, hajams practise a rude form of unscientific surgery with the help of their *laharani* (a

type of needle) and *ustura* (a type of razor). On the occasion of birth, *Mundan*, *Janeu*, (sacred-thread), marriage, death, etc, hajams perform very important role and in the Maithil society they have a significant position.

Kumhars

Like hajam, the kumhars also occupy an important place in the caste structure of Mithila. In almost all the villages and towns this caste is found. They are specialized in manufacturing earthen wares, tiles, etc. In Mithila they are popularly known as pandits, for they manufacture a number of earthen idols of gods and goddesses and, therefore command a great respect in the Maithil society as *murtikar*. In towns they are usually paid in cash, but in the rural area or where a Kumhar has "reserved villages", they are paid both in kind and cash in different harvesting seasons.

Malis

Under the Constitution of India they have been declared under backward classes. They are traditionally gardeners and flower sellers. They also prepare flower ornaments (*maurs*) of different sizes and shapes during the marriage and other ceremonies. However, with the decline in the economic position and other changes, their works as *malakars* (florist) have declined to a great extent.

Kewats and Mallahs

They also belong to the backward classes. They are the boating and fishing castes, but they also work in the agricultural fields. They are also specialized in collecting the *makhana* seeds from the ponds, and they also weave different types of fishing nets for catching fish in the ponds, rivers, *chaurs*, etc. They are located in bulk on both the sides of the rivers like Kamla, Balan, Burhi Gandak, etc, where boating and fishing are done at large scale. However, they are also found in most of the villages, where in addition to fishing, they also carry *bhars* on certain occasions.

In addition to these caste groups, there are many other castes in Mithila area and mention among them may be made of the Doms.⁹ Tanti (or Tatma), Halalkhor, Kandua, Musahar, Pasi, Rabidas, Khatbe, Pachania, etc. Again these castes have many subgroups, viz. the Doms of Mithila are divided into two subgroups, namely the

Supa and *Doms*; the *Dusadhs* are divided into 11 subgroups, viz. the Maghaiya, Kamar, Poliwar, Baburchi Kurin, Silontha, Surja, Kanaujia, Bahelia, Madeshiya, Dharhi, etc, but these are not being discussed here in detail. It may be pointed out here that some of these castes are gradually vanishing and among them mention may be made of the Pachania, Kandus, etc. Originally, the Pachanias were the traditional vaccinators, and they used to be called for the first vaccination (called as *panch*) to the newborn babies, which used to be performed ceremonially, but now after the establishment of Blocks in 1952-53 the trained vaccinators have been appointed by the government who are posted at the Blocks and, therefore, the right of vaccination has been taken away from the Pachanias. Similarly, the Kandus were specialized in husking *chura* (flat-rice), but today when *chura* is being husked in the mills, their profession has gradually gone down and the caste identity is vanishing rapidly.

Besides people of the Hindu caste, Muslims are also living in Mithila and they are found in almost all parts of this region. Like Hindu caste system, Muslims are also divided into various groups and among them mention may be made of the Mughals, Pathans, Sayyads, Sheikhs, etc. In addition to these upper classes of the Muslims, the following sections are also found in this area, viz. Bakkho (nomads) Dhunia (cotton carder), Dhobi (washerman) Darzi (tailor), Fakir (beggars), Ansari or Momin (weavers), Kajaratia (wrestlers), Kasai (butcher), Nalband (farrier), Pamaria (singer), Rangrez (dyers), etc.

So far as the caste structure of Mahakoshal is concerned, it may be suggested here that most of the caste groups of Mithila, viz. the Brahmins (of different regional affiliations, such as, the migrated Maithil Brahmins, Maharashtrians, Gujarati, Marwaris, Kanyakubja, etc.) Rajputs, Banias, Kurmis, Barbers, etc, are found here, but the tribal people are in overwhelming number. The tribal belt of Chhattisgarh is famous for the inhabitants of various tribes¹⁰ and among them mention may be made of the Gond, the Baiga, the Pandu, the Kodaku, the Korwa, the Khairwar, the Pardhan, the Negesia, Kavar, Dhanwar, etc.

The people of Mahakoshal usually speak a dialect known as "Chhatisgarhi", besides Hindi. The tribal people have their own dialects but they also speak the Chhatisgarhi dialect. In the interior rural areas tribals do not follow Hindi properly.

Among the lower castes of Mahakoshal, the Satnamis, who

were previously known as Mahars of Chamars, are found in big number, and their changing caste position under the reform movement¹¹ in the overall caste structure of Mahakoshal is of great anthropological significance.

Religious Beliefs of the People

The people of this Mithila region are mostly Hindu and among the Hindus, Brahmins are dominating. The followers of other faiths like the Islam, Christianity, Jain and Buddhism are comparatively very less. Among the minority groups, the Buddhists are in negligible number as there were only two Buddhists in the old erstwhile district of Darbhanga (presently comprising Darbhanga, Samastipur, and Madhubani) as per the Census of 1951.

The Hindus are the followers of different sects of Hindu pantheon, viz. the Sakti, Shiva, Vishnu, etc, although there are further sub-sects in each sect and the total number of these sects goes up to 72.¹²

Among these three sects, viz. the Sakti, Shiva and Vishnu, the Maithils are much devoted to worship in her various forms, namely, Kali, Durga, Tripur Sindhuri, Jwalamukhi, etc, and each Maithil family has a house deity (belonging to Sakti cult), which is called *Gosaun*. The lord Shiva is worshipped along with other members of his family like his consort Parvati, son Ganesha, etc, and Maithils are probably the specialized group to render the melodious song, specially meant for the worship of Siva and Parvati, which is popularly called as *Nachari*.¹³ In addition to these two cults, the Maithils also worship Rama, Krishna, Hanumana, etc, which suggests that they are also the followers of Vishnu. In the courtyard of each Maithil family one can easily find the presence of *Tulsi* plant, where in some cases the idols of Hanumana are also kept, and these are worshipped daily.

Besides the triad, that is, Sakti, Siva and Vishnu, as mentioned above, Ganesha and Surya (sun god) are also worshipped daily and these five constitute the *Pancha devata* of the Maithils' daily worship.

Maithils have no difficulty in worshipping more than one deity at a time, which is evident from the *tilak* mark on the forehead of a Maithil Brahmin. The vertical *tilak* mark shows their faith in Vishnu and a big dot of vermillion in the middle shows their devotion towards Sakti.

Religious Texts of the Maithils

The people of Mithila held certain books as very sacred such as the Vedas, various Puranas, the Yog-Vashistha, the *Shrimad Bhagwadagita*, the *Durga Saptashati*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Raghubansha*, etc. Besides these, there are several types of *Chalisas* (collection of couplets) such as *Hanuman Chalisa*, the *Shiva Chalisa*, etc, which are daily recited by the people. In course of daily discussion over religious matters, instances and references are cited from these sources and as a matter of fact these are the bases and sources of inspiration and a spiritual bliss to the Maithil devotees.

Religious Reform Movement in Mithila

The Vedantic catholicity of Hinduism, however, has not been able to prevent narrowness of outlook and bigotry from degrading the social life of the people of this region. Again the rigidity of caste rules and jealousy of new elements rising into virtues and reputation are its evidences.

During the medieval period Kabir, Surdas, and Tulsidas of the western provinces have left profound influences over the people of this area. Saint Kabir has been dear to the members of the lower castes like Gopes, Dusadha, Khatwes, etc, while the impact of Surdas and Tulsidas has been, more or less, confined to the educated castes like the Brahmins, Karna-Kayasthas, Rajputs, etc.

It has been observed that Kabir's followers live more by his spirit than by his words. The songs, the styles, rythms of their singing Kabirpanthi *bhajan*, are typical of Mithila. While the Kabirpanthi sing their *nirguns* in the Maithili language and in popular *Samdauni* tune of the area, the followers of Sur and Tulsī in Maithil area read them in Brajbhasha and Awadhi.

During the 15th century AD poet Vidyapati flourished as a celebrated poet of Maithila, who composed thousands of poems on Siva (called as Nachari), on *Bhagwati* (goddess), called as Gosaunik geet, etc, which have left everlasting influence on the religious outlook of the people of this area. Today not a single religious rite will be performed without singing these folk-songs, which are of religious nature. Since the beginning of this century a few more religious reform movements have taken place in Mithila area and among them a wave of non-violent sentiment of early thirties, which

left a large number of lower caste people vegetarian, is notable. A large number of people belonging to the Kewat caste, Dhanukh, Chamars, Dusadhs, Khatwe, Musahars, etc, gave up eating fish or meat, and put on *kanthi* (Tulsimala) round the neck, as a mark of non-injury to animals and devotion to Vishnu. It was, however, a significant fact that the new movement for non-injury to living beings did not influence much of the higher castes of Mithila. Again, there has been a considerable influence of the Brahmo Samaj on the local people, specially after the visit of Keshab Chandra Sen to the royal court of Darbhanga Raj in the last decade of the last century.

Thus, we find that in Mithila though Sakti and Siva cults are dominating and there is very close cooperation and adjustment among the different religious cults, as described above, there has been some influence of other religious cults also and the extent of influence on them differs from caste to caste.

In the light of these observations when we examine the religious beliefs of the people of Mahakoshal, we find that, as the area is dominated by the tribes as well as by the Satnamis, the religious beliefs of the people present a different picture. In addition to their faiths in their tribal gods and goddesses, they believe in, and offer worship to almost all the gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon. For instance, at Ratanpur, there are temples of goddess Mahamaya, Siva, Rama, Bhairab, Hanuman, etc, and on the occasion of Magh Mela,¹⁴ the tribes irrespective of their faiths or beliefs, worship all the Hindu deities, and take bath in the Dulhara tank, which is considered Ganga *par excellence*, perform ancestor worship on its bank and offer goat sacrifice to the goddess Mahamaya. Similarly, the Satnamis, who are the converted Chamars and the Mahars of Chhatisgarh, also worship all the deities of Hindu pantheon without any distinction. Thus, like Mithila, cooperation and coexistence among the different deities of Hinduism are also the specialities of Mahakoshal.

Religious reform movements have also taken place in Mahakoshal, and the Satnami reform movement which has been studied by Futch (1957:60) is one of the important movements taken place so far. The poet Rewa Rama of the 18th century of Ratanpur, has left considerable influence on the people of Mahakoshal, and his *bhajans*, other religious songs, etc, are still considered inspiring sources for the people of this region.

To sum up, so far the two civilizational regions have been

discussed mainly from the contextual point of view, though some examples have also been cited from the textual evidences. While discussing the two regions an attempt has been made to highlight firstly, the location of the Mithila and Mahakoshal, secondly, to discuss the land of the region as well as the people who inhabit the area, and thirdly, the main features of their religious life have also been highlighted. From these discussions, finally, it emerges that a civilizational region represented through ancient Hindu kingdoms has a territorial extension, which may not coincide with the administrative boundary, and people of various castes and communities, of various faiths and traditions, of course, having a common feeling of belonging to traditional region, inhabit the region.

Notes

1. For details, see *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. VIII, p. 187, 1907.
2. For details, see Appendix 6, where detailed list and names of the kings of the Haihai dynasty of Ratanpur Kingdom have been given.
3. For details, see Cunningham's book *Ancient Geography of India*, 1963.
4. The Kingdom of Kosala was estimated by Hiuen Tsiang as 6000 *Lee* in Circuit, which is corresponding to about 1000 miles.
5. For details, see the *Mithila Mahatma* (Ch. II) of the Brihad Vishnupurana where the Mahatma of fifteen sacred rivers has been described in detail.
6. On the fourth day of marriage, that is, *Chaturthi* day, a large quantity of fish is sent to the bride's place by the bridegroom's party, which is called *saguna bhar*. It is believed by the people of Mithila that even on the occasion of *Chaturthi* of Sitaji, wife of Lord Rama, fish had been sent to the bride's place at Janakpur and in that connection they refer to a couplet of the *Rama Charit Manas* written by Tulsidas which runs as *Min-Pin Pathin purane bhari bhari bhar kaharen Ane*. Besides it, fish is a must on the occasion of *Jitia* festival, *Chhati* (sixth day after the birth of the child), etc.
7. In course of the fieldwork at Ratanpur, the ancient capital of Mahakoshal, the author noted the names of about two hundred ponds, which are still there, and it was reported that many other legendary ponds have disappeared in course of time. For detailed list of ponds at Ratanpur, see Appendix 12.
8. For details, see Appendix II, where a detailed typology of the Vedic literature including the Upanishads (as per the classification of Veda Vyas and the Adi Sankaracharya) has been given.
9. The caste structure of the Dusadh of Darbhanga has been studied in detail by Dr N. Mishra (1975). For details, see his paper on "Some

Aspects of Dusadhs of Darbhanga", in *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, September, 1975). Also see *Harijans Today* by Prof L.P. Vidyarthi and Dr N Mishra Published by Classical Publishers, New Delhi, 1977.

10. Most of these tribes of Chhatisgarh have been studied under Chhatisgarh Area study project (in 1969) sponsored by the Anthropological Survey of India, Nagpur. For details see *Chhatisgarh: An Area Study* edited by A.K. Danda, 1977.
11. For details, see Fuch's book *Reform Movement in Central India*.
12. For details, see *The Sacred Complex of Janakpur*, 1971.
13. During the Mogul period "Nachari" song was so popular that even Abul Fazal, the famous writer of *Ayne-Akbari*, mentioned in this book that in those days Nachari could be heard even on the streets of Delhi. Again the famous poet Vidyapati (14th-15th century AD) of Mithila was a great devotee of Siva and it is reported that even Lord Siva served Vidyapati in the form of a servant known as Ugna, for a long time.
14. The Maghi mela takes place at Ratanpur once in a year and it is the biggest festival of Chhatisgarh. During the Maghi mela of 1970, the author studied the pilgrims composition at Ratanpur, and for details see his book *The Cultural Contour of an ancient Hindu Kingdom in Mahakoshal*, Ranchi, 1977.